とある自販機の行住計画

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PROLOGUE

A certain pirated broadcast A.

On a certain day in July.

Do you know about the Level 5 espers? My, my, this isn't some gaming production thing; they're the people who stand at the top of the six-tier hierarchy amongst our 2.3 million residents! The pyramid in the vast desert of Level 0s!

So, are the Level 5s standing at the pinnacle of the pyramid? That's just a wrong conclusion that you made. Those who stand at the pinnacle of the pyramid are Level 3s! The birds who are gracefully flying through the sky are Level 4s, and though they fly through the air freely most of the time, there are situations where they fall into a sandstorm when wind blows. Far above this chaotic situation that can't be seen, located high up in the sky, are the Level 5s.

"Accelerator", "Dark Matter", "Railgun", "Meltdowner", "Mental Out", "Eh, who's that Number Six…? Well, forget about it", "Hm, that Number Seven who's said to be really powerful"… Such a group of people are like the stars in the Big Dipper: so high above that we can't reach them.

Amongst them, there seem to be guys who've worked their way up the pyramid and to the stars, but they started off as Level 1s and not 0s. That's right, a sandstorm can't become a bird even if it can clip one.

What's there to talk about regarding a bunch of pitiful people who've had drugs and electric signals injected into their bodies and still can't even bend a spoon? They're just defeated mongrels.

But even mongrels can become a pack of wolves when gathered today. Today, let's talk about the legendary man who led the pack of wolves with their fangs pulled out, Kurozuma Wataru…

Hearing such a network broadcast, the youth with a nose ring on him, Hamazura Shiage, clicked his tongue and said, "What 'Kurozuma', damn it? It's Komaba-san's age now."

That pirated broadcast was directly aired through all sorts of channels in all sorts of places like a cat-and-mouse game, and even in Academy City, it could be considered a form of entertainment.

Members of Skill-Out were divided into many groups, and though Hamazura was a member of a larger group, he didn't even have a bit of power. Though he had the indecent talent of stealing cars, in Academy City, he—rather, they—were just treated completely as Level 0s.

Hamazura cut off the broadcast link as he praised his leader's name. As he said that, the surrounding Level 0s all nodded their heads and laughed as they agreed with Hamazura.

The bits of sand who'll knock the stars down kept being fearful of the existence of these beings that were treated as heroes as they continued to think that they were unable to be heroes, giving up on themselves.

Rewind to ten seconds back… In a certain dorm, a girl was listening to that same pirated broadcast, and clicked her tongue in disgust.

What's there to talk about a bunch of pitiful people who've had drugs and electric signals injected into their bodies and still can't even bend a spoon? They're just—

The girl cut the broadcast here, and inside the dark dormitory room, one could only hear the sound of the computer being used.

"Damn it, why are they describing people as stars?"

Sighing at the "star" comparison the broadcast raised, one of the seven Level 5 espers that Academy City was so proud of, Misaka Mikoto, was grumbling softly about that stupid behavior.

Behind her, another girl was growling angrily.

"That's really unbelievable, Onee-sama! Onee-sama's not just a star! Onee-sama's a sun that shines warmly on the Earth and brings forth the seeds of hope for the life of tomorrow! And I'm the moon that accepts this radiance of the sky. Right now, this is a mysterious celestial performance of two, forming together like an eclipse- GUAH HAHAHA!?"

"INSTEAD OF CALLING YOURSELF A CELESTIAL BODY, YOU MIGHT AS WELL CALL YOURSELF A PERVERT!"

Speaking midway through, Mikoto tucked the opponent's head underneath her armpit and performed a wrestling move. Shirai Kuroko's arms and legs were still twitching as she showed a happy expression while continuing to scream.

"AHH, AHHH! I CAN FEEL ONEE-SAMA'S TENDER ARMS, WAHH!"

Now increasing the force in her arms, Mikoto casually said what she thought.

“Speaking of which, even espers will feel uncomfortable about the last part of the broadcast.”

Saying up until here, she suddenly remembered a boy who called himself a Level 0.

“But maybe I can use that as a taunt.”

While thinking of that as she continued to use the wrestling technique, while Kuroko’s head started to turn purple,

A certain small hand grabbed on to Mikoto’s head.

“Huh?”

Though she thought that Kuroko had used teleport, she still remained in that position as she fearfully turned around to look.

Over there was a person who had walked in, looking over without any expression. A sophisticated lady with a round face was standing there.

“Lights-out was twenty-five seconds ago, yet you’re still here practicing your wrestling techniques. How passionate, Misaka.”

“Dorm supervisor.”

The needles of ice that had pierced through Mikoto’s back melted, causing cold sweat to come out.

“Hm, while you’re training, let me remind you of the dorm rules and show you what real wrestling techniques are like.”

“No, but this…”

And several seconds later,

In the girls’ dorm room, the girls’ tragic cries of despair replaced the broadcast as it aired throughout.

MAIN STORY

Toaru Jihanki no Sonzai Shoumei
by Narita Ryohgo

On a certain day in July, in a certain hospital in Academy City.

“I can make it.”

“Unconscious state.”

“Black widow’s eyes.”

“Unbelievable wound.”

“AIM?”

“Brain.”

“Sensei’s coming along?”

“That Child Error?”

“Kiyama was too early.”

“Tokiwadai’s Railgun.”

The noises could be heard echoing through a certain large hospital’s research facility.

Normally, that was an area that could only be accessed by those involved, and right now, there was a girl who looked like an elementary school student listening intently to the “crowds of voices”.

The girl got the necessary information from here, and asked the doctor beside her about something. Facing the problem the girl raised, the doctor could only shake his head in apology.

Thus, the girl showed a glimpse of a dark smile, and then said with a calm expression,

“Well, I’ll settle it, so don’t worry, doctor.”

“Child Errors are flawed items; it’s impossible for them to wake up with their own power.”

At the end of the conversation, the doctor could only sigh heavily at the smiling girl.

♦

During summer vacation, in a certain Anti-Skill office meeting.

“THE LEVEL 5S ARE FIGHTING!?”

The man who shouted that had been in the middle of taking off the equipment with the trident-shaped coat of arms on it when he stopped. He widened his eyes and stood up.

That report caused a ruckus amongst the extremely tired Anti-Skill members who had to deal with troublesome things daily.

“Where?”

“The park in District 7.”

“THE PARK!? WHAT’S THE SITUATION OVER THERE!?”

“Why did that happen?”

“What’s the status of those injured!?”

“Are there any injuries other than the espers?”

“No such reports up until now?”

“WHO ARE THE LEVEL 5S!?”

“Seems like the Third and the Seventh.”

“MISAKA AND SOGIITA!?”

“Why?”

“WAS THAT THE REASON TOKIWADAI REPORTED A POWER SHORTAGE!?”

“WHERE DID YOMIKAWA GO!?”

“Seems like she’s still giving remedials!”

“GET HER OVER HERE NOW!!”

“Yes!”

Though the chaos remained, they weren’t in a state of panic. The Anti-Skill members were adamant as they got ready to sortie—

“No, wait, there’s no need to call Yomikawa. It seems like it ended!”

The man who had reported the situation in the first place frowned as he used his hand to stop the Anti-Skill members beside him.

“It seems to have gotten weird. There seems to be two Judgment members there, but one of them seems to be related to ‘Kihara’.”

“!?”

Kihara. After hearing that name, the Anti-Skill members started making a commotion again. The female Anti-Skill member with the glasses tilted her head.

“Eh? Kihara? Is that the one involved in the Level Upper?”

“That’s Kiyama. Not ‘hara’, ‘yama’. Ah, well, it’s not like they don’t have any relationship.”

“Basically, the entire family is composed of researchers. It’s a rather famous name in Academy City. Well, that entire event was basically also because of that Kihara’s research. Since everything ended, the higher ups gave an order to Anti-Skill to not sortie. It seemed like they dealt with the damage.”

Hearing the man’s explanation, everyone started to look at each other’s faces, muttering as they looked lost.

“Two Level 5s and one really important related person; what experiment were they doing?”

“Why happened in Tokiwadai’s park!?”

It was an abnormal situation that the Anti-Skill members were all jumpy about.

The reason behind it was…

Just a loss of 120 yen at a certain vending machine.

♦

One hour ago, in the District 7 park.

“Uu. My neck’s still aching. Those injuries from the ‘Level Upper’ incident, and the pain when the dorm supervisor twisted my neck still remain,” Mikoto grumbled to herself while twisting her neck lightly.

“Looks like I have to exercise periodically.”

The girl who was sighing as she twisted her upper body like she was ready to exercise stopped after seeing a vending machine in front of her

It was the vending machine that was infamous in Tokiwadai Middle School for being a little faulty.

If one used a battering ram-like force on it, there would occasionally be good cases of having cans of juice drop out without the use of electronic cards or cash, but since the legend originated from Tokiwadai Middle School, the school of ojous, it was basically impossible to see anyone do it.

Let alone…

“HAAA!!”

Misaka Mikoto was definitely the only person who would kick it with electricity around the leg.

CRACK CLACK. With the sound of something being fractured, a can of juice appeared in the exit.

“Mm, my body’s okay now.”

While grumbling as she cracked her shoulders and neck, she wondered,

(…Well, as Judgment officers, Kuroko and Uiharu should have it tougher than me. I shouldn’t grumble like this.)

But at that moment, she didn’t realize that what she had just done was basically interfering with Judgment’s work.

She opened the seal of the canned juice, and drank half of it down in one gulp.

At that moment, there was another figure that appeared beside the vending machine.

(…Hm? Kuroko?)

She saw the obvious twin ponytails that appeared beside the vending machine, and remembered that Kuroko could teleport. With that information, Mikoto gathered her concentration to defend herself.

And then, before she could react and fight back—

A strange sensation struck her.

The surrounding air was distorted. There seemed to be something that entered her, as every single strand of muscle fiber and even her internal organs seemed like they could be seen through. That was what Mikoto felt.

…?

Feeling insecure, Mikoto hurriedly turned around—

“This is Judgment, Tokiwadai onee-san.”

“EH?”

A twin-ponytailed girl who was slightly shorter than Mikoto appeared in front of her.

For a moment, she thought that it was Shirai Kuroko, but the way she had said that “This is Judgment” was completely different, and the voice was completely different as well. Though she was definitely wearing the armband, there was a slight difference in the shape of the ponytail. To add to that, the girl had shiny blond hair.

And more important than anything else, the thing that was different from Kuroko was that…

The girl who said “Judgment” had a red kiddy schoolbag.

“Ah, about that.”

Not knowing how to respond, Mikoto tilted her head and gave an earnest smile.

In Academy City, “Judgment” was formed by student volunteers from all schools, including Uiharu and Kuroko. Though there were many instances of many different schools working together, it was basically a system where each school worked independently. Over here, there were also elementary school Judgment officers, and Mikoto knew that, because Kuroko and Uiharu had started training in grade school.

Her hair didn’t look dyed, and Mikoto didn’t even know if she was Japanese. Remembering that the girl had used Japanese when she made her entry, there seemed to be nothing that was worth taking note of.

At first, Mikoto didn't understand why this grade-school Judgment officer that she didn't know would approach her with such a term, but after looking at the can in her arm, she seemed to realize something…

The girl in front of her slowly let out a smile and said in a somewhat delightful tone, "I didn't think that 'the chance' would be here so easily."

"'Chance'?"

At that moment, Mikoto suddenly felt that something was out of place.

It was not just a bad premonition—in fact, "something" was swallowing her.

"!? Wait, what are you doing?"

"You're under arrest for vandalism and theft, you know? Onee-san."

The direct emotion came from the girl's expression and voice.

Overwhelming antagonistic intent.

"!"

Though she didn't know what was going on, Mikoto could feel a terrifying force creating a signal within her.

The kid in front of her was dangerous.

Having been shown an "antagonistic intent" that would let her let out electricity in reflex, Mikoto tried her best to hold back her power while backing away from the source of this signal within her.

Then, seemingly in the next moment, 0.5 seconds from where she was, she could see the blond girl rushing towards her. There should have been a distance of several metres, but she had already reached that place. And then, logically, she should fall here. However, the twin-ponytailed girl kicked the gravel surface and immediately rushed at Mikoto.

(This isn't any ordinary girl!)

"It's time to rest, Level 5 onee-san!"

The girl's right hand was twitching strangely as she rushed in like a bullet, trying to grab Mikoto's neck.

Mikoto's entire body was now stimulated by an even stronger signal—

She let out her ability on reflex.

And then, bluish-white sparks spread through the park…

♦

Near the park.

Haratani Yabumi was depressed.

It was supposed to be a rare summer vacation afternoon, walking down the high-security Tokiwadai district while getting uninvolved with delinquents…

“AMAZING PUNCH!!”

It should amount to such an unordinary scene.

As the weird technique name could be heard, that man’s fist let out a mysterious wave and sent the huge man flying.

Even if it was a Level 5 walking about in Academy City, that could be considered an “abnormal” situation.

The big guy who had been sent flying stood up with light feet and smirked.

“Ku, to be able to send this visceral grinder Yokosuka flying away in this 30th revenge match. Sogiita Gunha, you brat, you seem to have gotten stronger than before.”

In contrast to the man who looked like some evil terrorist boss in movies, the boy was wearing a Rising Sun flag T-shirt and white uniform over it; and though splendid-looking, it looked somewhat old-fashioned. “The seventh Level 5 of Academy City” Sogiita Gunha replied with a strong tone,

“Oi, hot pot guy, you actually managed to tank ten of my amazing punches. Seems like you got guts. As a token of respect, let me show you my more powerful technique.”

Haratani knew the males called Sogiita, Yokosuka, and the nickname “hot pot guy”, but it was too troublesome to remember them as he could only sigh and watch them fight.

“Wh-what!? So it’s coming!? I’M SO HAPPY, SOGIITA!! GO TO HELLLLLL!!!”

Standing up with a delighted expression, Yokosuka jumped up and rushed at Sogiita.

Facing him head-on, Sogiita clenched his fist, and with all his strength, he shouted,

“SUPER AMAZING PUNCH!!!”

“IT DIDN’T GET ANY STRONNNNNGERRRRRRRRRR!!!”

Flying out and crashing into the railings on both sides of the road, Yokosuka lost consciousness just like that. Seeing him and the railings that got reduced to scrap metal, Haratani sighed as he wanted to say something—

But before that could happen, a girl who suddenly appeared said to Sogiita,

“This is Judgment.”

The twin-ponytail girl’s hair was swaying about as she showed her armband to Sogiita. Though she seemed to be a middle schooler from nearby, she should be a somewhat impressive one given that she was a member of Judgment.

“I came here after hearing commotion of a fight. That person over there fell asleep because of your attack, am I right?”

Facing the girl who had definitely used teleport to get there, Sogiita nodded his head calmly.

“Ohhh, I see! A girl like you can become a member of Judgment. Which means that you have quite the guts! Do your best!”

“…”

“On a side note, the answer to your question is ‘yes’—but then again, it’s more accurate to say that he got knocked out instead of saying that he fell asleep. Even though he fainted, that guy got guts. Got to remember that!”

Seeing Sogiita give her a thumbs-up, the girl from Judgment frowned and pulled out metal needles-like things from her inner thighs, and said something that a Judgment officer should say.

“It seems like you don’t understand your situation now. Anyway, based on the situation I’ve seen from the battle just now, you’re suspected of causing damage. Please explain further after you’re arrested.”

Though she was right, Haratani said,

“Ahh, no, Miss Judgment officer, that was…”

He just fought back in response to an opponent’s taunt. Though it was an overkill act of self-defense, they wouldn’t know if that guy was a leader of some gang members with arms. This could have been a decent way to defend Sogiita, but before that could happen, the suspect responded with a gutsy tone,

“Fighting? That’s not right, missy.”

“Huh?”

“All I did was get guts into him!”

(YOU BASICALLY SAID THAT YOU ABUSED HIM!!!)

Haratani wanted to shout out from deep within his throat, but after seeing that stupid guy, he realized that it was already troublesome to even glance at the Judgment officer, and thus shook his head to say that it didn’t matter if she arrested him.

“I’m going to arrest you.”

It was useless to say anything for him. Thinking like this, Shirai Kuroko reached her hand out at the opponent’s stomach—

And used her teleport ability to tilt the opponent upside down.

She would then teleport his body onto the ground and use the metal needles to pin his clothing to the floor like usual. It was just that simple—

But that would normally happen in battles against Skill-Out members.

What was troubling was that this guy was completely different from a Level o in all aspects.

“HAAAAAAAAAA!!!”

With a roar of hot-bloodedness, the surroundings started to be affected by the wave.

The vibration of the atmosphere echoed throughout, and everyone hurriedly covered their ears even though they knew that it was too late.

He didn’t even need to use his hands. He just used a shout to prevent himself from falling down.

If it just involved an ability, anyone would feel that it was simply stupid. But no matter the result, the fact was that he stood upright in front of everyone.

“That sudden turnabout really shocked me. Was that teleport?”

“!! An esper, huh? So it doesn’t matter if I go all-out, right?”

The words came out later than the action, as Kuroko let out a fearless smile, teleported her own body above the opponent, and let gravity take her as she attacked down at the enemy.

Any ordinary man who saw that completely unexpected attack from above would easily collapse to the floor, but the moment her feet landed on the guy's head, a heavy impact could be felt from there.

It felt like a human-shaped wheel got kicked as Kuroko jumped backwards in a leaping manner. She stared at him with a puzzled look.

It didn't look like a complete block of the attack, as the guy put his hand on his head and turned around.

"Owww... What was that? ...Super speed or time stop? No, wait, you can teleport yourself, right? That's some guts you have there! But I won't accept ambushes. A man has to teleport his opponent right in front of him! Oh, but you're a girl, so that's fine... I guess."

The esper started to answer his own question, and behind him, it seemed like something was wavering like a mirage.

(This seems to be different from those ordinary opponents in the past,) Kuroko thought.

"You seem like you have some mysterious power. I can't think of a clear way to beat you if I don't know what your power is."

"Oi oi, are you treating me as one of those baseless secret organization members? Listen closely; my ability is..."

The mysterious guy stood upright, probably intending to answer that question without hiding or running away, but...

Uuu, the boy who looked familiar from the side frowned and answered,

"How should I describe my ability?"

"..."

"Well, my ability is still baseless! It expands endlessly! That's gutsy!!"

Seeing this exchange, Kuroko was wondering about how to deal with this guy in front of her.

She couldn't understand the nature of the ability, but at least it was not to the extent of a Level 1 or less.

But she didn't feel any antagonistic intent. That guy didn't look like some delinquent aside from his outfit. In this situation, Kuroko could just talk to him and not need to carry out an arrest, so right now, she was wondering how to solve this.

But at that moment—

An intense explosion could be heard from a corner of the park in District 7 that was of huge significance to Kuroko.

Thinking about what happened, she turned around. *Wasn't that bluish-white electricity that was shot from between the trees in the park?*

"ONEE-SAMA!?!?"

Seeing the flash she recognized, Kuroko frantically thought of rushing over, but she couldn't just leave this mysterious esper behind. She was torn by her duties as a member of Judgment.

But at that moment, she did not have a need to continue worrying.

"Oi, what are you standing around for? Something happened. A Judgment officer has to show some guts here, you know?"

The mysterious esper himself went running to the park.

"I'll act first!!"

"Eh, how... Why? Any ordinary person should back down and talk! You're under arrest, you know!?!?"

"Relax! I'm rather proud that my expanding guts are more than an ordinary person's!!"

"THAT'S NOT AN ANSWER!!"

As she shouted, the guy in the white uniform kicked off the floor without thinking. An impact that was slightly stronger than the shout from before covered the surroundings, and that air pressure was so strong that nobody could breathe.

Squinting, what she could see beyond the gaps in the hand she raised was an explosion of red-, blue-, and yellow-colored smoke and a guy who "jumped" up and rushed to the park like a human bullet.

The guy in the white uniform managed to advance by several meters with just a kick, and Kuroko watched him leave before asking the other boy who was left behind,

“Who was that guy?”

Haratani pulled a face with regards to the girl’s question.

“That’s created from a Level 5 esper. What you saw was all just an illusion. It would be better for your mental health if you think of it like that. Maybe…”

♦

The park.

Standing on the top of the streetlights, Mikoto fired numerous railguns.

She was using the iron sand to create conductive metallic rods, and there were about twenty of them floating around her. Looking down at the park from a higher position, she was like a conductor of an orchestra as she swung her electricity covered right hand. The surrounding spears fell downwards at a certain area of the park like a thunderstorm.

But just as that exhibition of a thunder god’s rage was going on—

A girl was moving between the gaps of the electric strikes and towards the streetlamp that Mikoto was standing on.

This girl “dodged the electric strikes”. That was the fact that Mikoto was seeing.

Fast.

If there was a need to describe it simply, this word would be enough.

Forget about the fact that she was an elementary school student; this girl basically had speed and power that far exceeded what a human could logically have.

It seemed that this girl had dynamite in all her joints, creating an illusion of instant burst and force. The girl’s body was creating a “speed” that was faster than a beast.

The girl was moving towards Mikoto, who was standing on the streetlamp, as she proceeded at a terrifying speed that was just like removing the light of the railguns. She stepped onto the ground and jumped up before Mikoto could even prepare her next shot. Several parts of the stone floor in the park were blown off, and the girl’s body was moving towards the streetlamp that was far taller than her.

Trying to avoid the opponent, Mikoto suddenly jumped off the streetlamp. It was unknown if the girl expected that, as she was targeting some place slightly lower than the top of the streetlamp.

If this kept up, they would definitely meet in the end.

Mikoto let out bluish-white sparks from both hands, and she started to fall very slowly.

“!”

Having lost the opportunity, the girl wanted to kick the streetlamp to redirect herself, but at that moment, Mikoto let out an intense electric shock from her right hand.

However, this attack wasn’t aimed at the girl.

The streetlamp she had been standing on was different from the rest. It was composed of a white thermal filament, and once this sort of filament took in too much burden, it would burn out before it could give a bright glow.

But right now, this was enough to take away the girl’s sight while she was right beside the lightbulb.

“Ku!”

As the girl moaned, Mikoto used enough electricity to rob the opponent of her movement.

However, the girl whose eyes were shut seemed like she could see the attack, as she used her right hand to knock the streetlamp and get away from the line of attack.

Despite having squashed a part of the metallic streetlamp pole, the girl’s hand did not appear injured.

Several seconds later, both girls landed in front of the vending machine like how it began.

“Who exactly are you?”

Biri biri. The electricity surrounded Mikoto like snakes as she asked the girl in front of her.

The moment she was about to be caught, Mikoto instinctively activated her ability. This young girl dodged, with superhuman reflexes, the electric strike that Mikoto had released, and Mikoto was slightly shocked at this young girl as she started to show some more emotions. But before she could deal with them, the young girl swung a fist with even more antagonistic intent, and without even saying anything to convince the other party, both sides gradually went into combat mode.

In this situation when they could finally talk again, Mikoto tried to talk to the girl, but—

“This is Judgement, Level 5 onee-san.”

“I don’t want to listen to this—or rather, is a grade-schooler like you unable to understand my question?”

“Uh huh.”

Both of them revealed fearless smiles, the elementary school girl and the middle school girl.

“Kihara Nayuta.”

After a while, the girl calmly stated her name.

“Special school prefect of the Advanced Education Department, and RFO of Judgment.”

“Eh?”

The girl’s words caused Mikoto to waver slightly.

That name that sounded like that of a school had never reached her eardrum before, and never had she seen it before.

However, Mikoto recognized that name.

Once, she read a female scientist’s “memory” through electric signal flow. The name of that primary school and the name Kihara had appeared in there.

However, that “memory” never showed the image of this girl.

“What’s going on? That school should have been—”

“So you knew? Where did you hear that from? From Kiyama-sensei?”

“!”

Kiyama-sensei. That term was enough to cause a spine-chilling reaction in Mikoto.

Maintaining the electric pulses in her body that were spreading out, Mikoto inquired further into her opponent’s history.

“A student of that school? That means you’re…”

Mikoto wanted to say the words “Child Error”, but she swallowed them before she could.

But Nayuta seemed to have realized what Mikoto wanted to say, as she snickered,

“I’m not a Child Error.”

“…”

Unable to grasp the true identity of her opponent, Mikoto shook her head.

Despite the fact that the person in front of her was a Level 5, Nayuta looked smug as she said,

“I’m just the ‘process’.”

“‘Process’?”

“Created from the experiment where Banri onee-san and the rest became its guinea pigs; the representative of the Crystallized Esper Essence, one process of the many predicted results; and just a guinea pig. That’s me.”

“What in the world are you saying?”

Frowning, Mikoto again felt insecurity within herself.

It was like the unpleasant feeling of undergoing a thorough body scan, and it was likely that this girl in front of her was the cause.

“Is this strange feeling your doing? What did you do?”

Mikoto asked directly. In response, Nayuta looked somewhat surprised.

“Eh, so you knew what I’m doing? Is it because of that tremendous power? Or is it that your electromagnetic power can do something like telekinesis?”

“I thought I asked what you did, right?”

“Right hand.”

The moment the girl said this, the electricity that was wrapped around Mikoto’s right hand started to expand aggressively, letting out bluish-white sparks and continuing to cackle as the noise directly entered the ground.

“Eh?”

Mikoto stared at her right hand, not knowing what was going on at all. She did not cast electricity at the ground consciously; it just got released from her right hand naturally, completely unrelated to her consciousness.

After the girl in front of her said “right hand”,

Nayuta showed a cruel smile and said,

“Left hand.”

Mikoto felt the bluish-white sparks gather in her left hand. She frantically tried to restrain it, but like a hiccup that couldn’t be controlled, she let out an electric flow from her left hand on reflex.

“Don’t tell me you…”

“An experiment that deliberately causes abilities to overload. That is the name of the experiment which Banri onee-san and the rest became test subjects in. Mikoto onee-san knows about it, right?”

Those weren’t words that a primary school student would use. Mikoto remembered the conversation she had with Kiyama Harumi a few days ago.

“A lot of things were created from that experiment; one of them was a crystal called ‘Body Crystal’. It is a drug that ‘deliberately causes an ability to overload’. Actually, the experimental item has existed since a few years ago.”

Continuing to talk, the girl’s eyes looked like a hunter hunting prey as she stared at the Level 5 in front of her.

“So let me ask you, ‘Railgun’ nee-san…”

“…”

“If this ‘Body Crystal’ appears as an ‘ability’ that can ‘overload other people’s abilities and power and even control their ability flow’, that can’t be considered an ‘overload’, right? Well, I can manipulate the flow and timing, but I can’t track someone down to the ends of the galaxy and even take away their ability like Takitsubo onee-san.”

On seeing that she just said a name Mikoto didn’t know of, Nayuta looked disheartened, but she immediately abandoned it and showed a bone-chilling smile that was completely unlike a kid.

“Right now, anyway.”

♦

Kihara Nayuta was a guinea pig.

That was the life she chose when she was young.

The “Kihara” family had quite the standing in Academy City, and while everyone else in the family chose to head down the road of research, the young Nayuta chose a different path.

On a certain day, Nayuta said with a cruel and merciless smile on her face to a professor who had quite the authority even amongst that family,

“Flawed items like Child Errors can’t even be guinea pigs.”

The young girl requested to be a test subject.

“If an experiment is to be top-notch, the test subject has to be top-notch!”

Everyone thought that she was going to say something else, and the researchers around her all looked at each other. Since she was still a little girl, she probably dreamt that she could use magic by undertaking the experiment. Though it was enough to just laugh it off, that old professor, Kihara Gensei, smiled with “other intentions” and gently patted on Nayuta’s head.

“Ohh, ohh, Nayuta’s a good kid. You want to offer your body for the development of Academy City’s first Level 6? Before that, your ‘cousin’, that ‘nee-san’ willingly became a guinea pig herself, but Nayuta, you’re the first one to actually request that yourself.”

This professor could easily use others as his own test subjects and destroy them even if they were his own relatives. The surrounding researchers felt a chill down their backs, and it was not just because it would overload.

After Kihara Gensei disappeared mysteriously, Nayuta used all sorts of other means to experiment on herself.

That was something that couldn’t be revealed, an experiment that she should have never messed with.

Due to the effects of the drugs, her hair and eyes changed color. Even so, she didn’t mind at all.

Even though she carried out the experiment that would cause great pain to her body, she never succumbed to the pain.

She even took part in the mental aspects of the “Testament” experiment that Nunotaba Shinobu also took part in. She used her mind’s consciousness to rebuild her ability’s calculations thoroughly, and then used the “results” as samples to develop them further. She became a “Kihara” radical who offered her mind and body to experiment even after she wasn’t able to.

"The Kiharas are elites. But wouldn't it be meaningless if they can't surpass a Level 5 even after becoming guinea pigs?"

After repeating those experiments who knew how many times, she started laughing maniacally and answered as she continued to devote her body into a new experiment.

In the end, what she got was "the ability to 'see' and 'feel' the flow of AIM diffusion fields". This was a power she wanted not as a guinea pig but as a researcher.

An older girl that had a similar power was now one of the candidates to become the next Level 5, and she was in Item. Nayuta's ability couldn't compare to that girl's, but she didn't need to use the drug called "Body Crystal". Looking at it that way, she may have been able to advance to a higher Level. This was a possibility she had.

Of course, there was a price to the experiment.

♦

"I see, so this is like tickling someone's neck to make them laugh."

Hearing the explanation of the ability, Mikoto answered with a forced tone, but there was still doubt lingering within her.

Mikoto originally thought that the abnormal speed she had shown was her "ability". Though she felt that it was done through a certain power that boosted her movements, what the girl had just said was not enough to explain it.

Besides, there was a bigger question.

"And besides, why did you challenge me? This antagonistic feeling seems to be out of personal issues rather than Judgment's work."

As Mikoto was talking, Nayuta was showing a smile that did not fit her cute face. It was like a humanoid monster in those horror movies grinning vilely at the victims who were suffering a terrible fate.

"I don't have any personal anger. But even though it's not anger, there are all sorts of emotions that I can't get rid of."

Muttering to herself, Nayuta glared at Mikoto's body.

"It's a little early, but I still want to determine the results of my experiment. The 'results' that were born from Academy City, the seven Level 5s that stand at the peak, I want to see if I've reached that place, even if it's just a little bit. Basically, I can't fight if I don't have a valid reason; thus, I became a member of Judgment. 'Always waiting to see who will do what'."

Mikoto did not really understand what she intended by those words, but she at least understood what her opponent wanted to say. Mikoto frowned and said somewhat unhappily,

“So that means that you just used ‘those kids’ sacrifice’ as a stepping stone to try to boost your own power? Your personality’s rather twisted for a girl your age.”

The “Child Errors” that were used as test subjects were still unconscious. Mikoto had never met them, but she taunted Nayuta with much anxiety.

However, after hearing those words, Nayuta’s expression changed.

“That’s not true.”

“Eh?”

The smile disappeared. Nayuta glared at Mikoto with even more hostility.

“Everyone’s not some martyr.”

The dark flames in her eyes were burning as she tilted her head aside, causing the bones to crack.

Something started feeling out of place. Mikoto wanted to continue talking, but…

“‘Child Errors’ are just flawed items to Academy City.”

“…”

“BUT EVEN IF THEY’RE FLAWED, HUMILIATING THEM LIKE THIS IS UNFORGIVABLE!!”

Seemingly trying to end this conversation, the girl stomped hard on the road, and sent bits flying. Her slender body leapt towards Mikoto.

Though Mikoto did not really know what to do about the restart of the battle, having gotten used to fighting, she naturally matched the opponent’s movements and breathing, and stepped forward towards the opponent.

At the same time, there was an uneasy feeling in her right hand as it forcefully tried to release electricity.

But Mikoto guided this attack with a magnetic field on her left hand, and immediately captured the “overload”. It seemed that Nayuta couldn’t manipulate AIM diffusion fields that appeared in more than one area.

During the 0.5 seconds when Nayuta closed in, Mikoto deduced the power of the opponent, and realized something shocking.

This “conscious overload” was just a “bait” to cause the opponent to be alert.

As for her power, what she really needed to be wary about was the AIM diffusion field “visualizing” that was impossible to detect without high-tech machinery.

Lightning travelled way faster than 100 km per hour, and it was nigh impossible to avoid on sight.

However, if one could see the “energy” that formed the source of this electricity and predict its direction, there would be an opening.

But it would be just for an instant. Even if one understood the power and direction of the electricity that was produced, it was much harder to avoid it than a bullet.

However, Nayuta had a “speed” that could do it.

This speed can’t be explained with that ability just now!

While admiring her opponent’s speed, Mikoto fearlessly faced that “speed” head-on.

She opened her body wide, and released the electricity that had escaped to her left hand.

In this electromagnetic field that was without any openings, Nayuta kicked the ground and barely escaped this forcefield, and her body danced high into the air.

Just like that, she landed behind Mikoto and reached her hand out at Mikoto’s neck.

But Mikoto, who released the electromagnetic field throughout the surroundings, detected the attack without even turning her head back.

Balls of iron sand rose up from behind Mikoto and spread out at Nayuta.

“!”

Normally she would jump into the mist of iron without thinking, but she “saw” the flow of energy and immediately slowed down before increasing her distance from Mikoto.

Most likely, she was used to fighting such rude and unreasonable people as a member of Judgment.

Like Kuroko, she was used to fighting espers “outside school”. Facing off against this Judgment officer with the attitude, Mikoto again said,

“If you dare to touch me while I have electricity on me, what’s that thing on your hand?”

As she said that, she let the iron sand that was accumulated from the surrounding dirt and sand form objects that were as large as golf balls, letting them float around in tens, hundreds.

Like a disco ball rotating, the black figures danced about in the midst of the bluish-white sparks. Standing in the midst of this amazing scene, Mikoto let out a fearless smile, and the numerous balls flew towards the girl.

Nayuta could see the flow of the ‘energy’, but the electric discharge between the iron sand balls couldn’t be seen. She most likely thought that the opponent wouldn’t use her full power, as she used this chance not to escape but to enter the crowd of balls and close in on Mikoto.

Next, she realized her stupidity and frantically tried to let her body escape.

But it was too late.

The iron sand balls collapsed into even smaller ones and expanded out, surrounding Mikoto and Nayuta’s surroundings. They then emitted bluish-white sparks.

With the park as the center, Mikoto used the iron sand balls that were conducting electricity to cover the entire place in a dome, letting electricity flow through them. The gaps between the balls let out electricity, forming a large electric cage with Mikoto at its center.

Looking at Nayuta who was trapped in this case, Mikoto let this “cage” slowly shrink towards her.

“!”

Nayuta wanted to let a part of Mikoto’s power “overload” and expand the iron sand balls, but Mikoto immediately repaired that and regenerated the damaged cage.

The girl’s ability could “overload”, but it couldn’t “stop”.

Well aware of this, Mikoto let the electric cage spin fast and close in.

“So now what? Do you still want to continue!?”

Trying to convince her opponent to surrender, her words got interrupted. Nayuta leapt at Mikoto without hesitation.

Mikoto let out an electrical surge from her entire body, trying to prevent the opponent from touching her. But Nayuta didn't mind as she used her hand to spear into the electric wall.

The bluish-white sparks ran down Nayuta's body, and the girl let out a "slightly" bitter look.

But that wasn't enough to slow her momentum, as Nayuta's right hand closed in on Mikoto.

Seeing that the hand was about to reach her neck, Mikoto twisted her body and tried to use the electrical flow to knock the opponent off.

She let electricity flow into the opponent's nerves, using the involuntary reflexes to stop Nayuta. This was an ability that used a large amount of calculations. However, the girl's hand didn't slow down for some reason, and it was even closing in on Mikoto in a random manner.

"!"

Having stretched her hand out, Mikoto grabbed Nayuta's hand.

"As expected, your hand has something… hm, wait, what is it?"

Barely able to defend from the opponent's sudden attack, Mikoto said after she saw the opponent's right hand, "Just some relaxants. But I may have overdone it."

The girl's right hand was outstretched in front of Mikoto. Over there, she can see a hole that was dug out of the palm of the hand, and there was something small that looked like it got injected.

"You… this right hand…"

The girl's hand wasn't damaged at all after the electric attack just now. There were burns all over the hand, and several bits of skin were curled up. However, what was oozing out wasn't blood but something transparent that felt like lubricant. Under the curled-up skin wasn't tender red flesh but long strands of black artificial fibers.

"I said it earlier, onee-san. I'm a guinea pig."

The prosthetic hand clearly let out a creaking sound, and she "proudly smiled" at her situation now, and said,

“After injecting ‘the unique power of this city’ into my body, it started exploding all over the place. However, I was able to get meaningful data. If it wasn’t for that frog-faced doctor, it’s likely that I would be dead now.”

Nayuta said all that without blanking, and Mikoto realized that after meeting her eyes.

Her right eye was letting out a mysterious “glulp glulp” sound. The color was different from a natural one, and the irises were giving a tint of something.

“After that, I took on several experiments, and about 70% of my body isn’t of flesh anymore.”

Action was faster than words as she pointed at her left eye and opened her artificial right eye wide.

The next moment, that right eye let out a bright glow, taking Mikoto’s vision away.

Mikoto felt endangered from this loss of vision, so she wanted to let out a light electric shock at the girl to bind her. However, Nayuta didn’t let Mikoto’s wavering slip for even a single moment as she moved her entire body of artificial muscles and escaped from the opponent’s grasp, pulling herself a great distance away.

Nayuta, who was just able to avoid the electric attack, seemed happy as she smiled at Mikoto.

“Ahh, it’s alright since there are earth wires, but onee-san’s electricity is really tough. It’s still numbing.”

“I see. So you use this body to carry out superhuman fights.”

“My family reads the esper’s diffusion field flow and uses the gap to attack. Because I haven’t learnt it yet, I can only use this mechanical body and my own ability to make up for the lack of senses those amazing people have. They were able to detect the opponent’s energy flow just through instinct and experience.”

The creaking sound was still echoing in her mind. Nayuta’s right eye still had some flash in it even after blinking, and then she said,

“The one who taught me all these, Amata oji-san, told me that ‘if I train this to the max, there’d be nothing to be afraid of when fighting that #1 esper in Academy City, and I can win’. But in fact, so what?”

Saying that, she stared at Mikoto while maintaining the smile on her face.

“I don’t have any grudges against onee-san. It’s just that I want to prove my own ‘strength and justice’. ‘So that Banri onee-san and the rest can smile as they wake up’.”

Mikoto didn’t really understand the meaning behind it, but after hearing those words that had loneliness and determination, Mikoto sighed and let even more electricity surround her like a more powerful snake.

“I don’t know the specifics, but at least I understand that you’re not like those simple cold-blooded animals. Willing to take on an opponent head-on like this; well, Kuroko may say that this is what an amateur would do, but I rather like it.”

“Really?”

“No problem. Though it’s not the first time someone younger than me challenged me, I do fight against older people. I don’t hate ‘such things’.”

Mikoto drew the iron sand from the ground and used it in a manner that was different from the semi-sphere-shaped iron balls that were emitting electricity between them, creating a black sword.

“Since you’re challenging me, I accept. Let’s have a fight that we won’t regret. Fight with all we got.”

“I’m going all-out then, ‘Railgun onee-san’.”

Mikoto and Nayuta let out fearless smiles, and they rushed towards each other, getting ready for an even more intense battle.

However…

“OI OI, WHAT’S GOING ON!? POWER OVERLOAD!? I’M HELPING YOU NOW!!”

A voice that didn’t understand the atmosphere here could be heard.

“AMAZIIINGGG PUNCHHH!!!”

An impact that didn’t understand the atmosphere here surrounded this place,

Blowing aside the “cage” that was made of iron sand balls and electricity.

The guy who couldn’t understand the atmosphere appeared in front of them both in a hot-blooded manner.

♦

However, during this time, most of the people living in District 7 noticed the bluish-white sparks in the park.

The people who saw the commotion were shouting, and the people who were viewing this light through the windows in their apartments were going “Ahh, that crazy Tokiwadai girl is at it again”. They all immediately realized it, and cut off the power in their houses in advance, turned off the power of their computers, and pulled out the cables from their sockets. And so, the “anti-disaster program” was under way.

The people who were walking on the streets were moving away from the park, thinking that they shouldn’t get close. However…

“!”

A girl who saw the bluish-white electric sparks started to move as the “biri biri” sounds could be heard.

She was moving in a completely different manner from the crowd. Or rather, it seemed like she was attracted by the bluish-white sparks in the park.

♦

“No worries! I don’t know what’s going on, but you can relax now!”

The guy in the white uniform forcefully nodded his head and shouted at Mikoto and Nayuta.

Seeing such a guy, Mikoto’s jaw dropped, and she asked,

“Who are you?”

“What? This isn’t something worth introducing myself with! But if I have to say—”

Interrupting the guy who was about to introduce himself was the voice of the person Mikoto was used to hearing inside the park.

“Onee-sama? What’s going on here!?”

“Eh? Kuroko?”

Kuroko appeared in front of the guy through the use of “instant teleport”, and asked with a loud voice. The guy whose collar was grabbed by Kuroko’s right hand was going “oi, that’s not my doing!”

“Ara ara, using such amazing power in the park. Who is it for, eh?”

Kuroko turned to look at the twin-ponytailed girl in front of Mikoto with the Judgment armband on her.

“A member of Judgment? Speaking of which, I’ve never met you before. Oh, well, I’m Shirai Kuroko of Tokiwadai Middle School. What happened?”

After a greeting, Kuroko asked the girl who was also a member of Judgment.

Nayuta was showing an uninterested look at Kuroko, and then quickly reverted back to the childish child as she reported to the older Judgment officer.

“I’m Kihara Nayuta of the 49th Branch, special school prefect of the Advanced Esper Department and Judgment RFO. As there’s an onee-san who kicked and vandalized a vending machine and stole juice from it, I wanted to arrest her. Will you help me, senpai?”

“Vandalism and theft? That’s exaggerating!!”

Mikoto frantically tried to say,

But Kuroko immediately kneeled down with an expression as if the world was ending, and said with a tragic voice,

“I KNEW THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN ONE DAY!!”

“K-Kuroko?”

“I’m really sorry, Onee-sama! If only I could have advised you harder! But I’m an accomplice for leaving Onee-sama like this! Let us enter the same jail cell and accept the punishment together! And Uiharu and the rest will be sad that I went against Judgment’s duties!”

“Sigh, well, you fought it instead of just resisting it.”

Though Nayuta wasn’t lying, Mikoto couldn’t really explain the situation clearly.

“I understand it all.”

The guy in the white uniform placed his hand on Mikoto’s shoulder as if he was about to lecture her.

“It’s true that it’s foolish to destroy a vending machine. But I can understand the pain of being unable to buy even a can of juice. However, you can’t commit crimes. Even if it’s at the vendors who created this vending machine, the housewives and kids who rely on it for food, and the dogs and crickets that are kept as pets, they will be bothered, right?”

“Eh? EHHHH?”

Mikoto was feeling bothered by this guy in the white uniform who was lecturing her like some relative.

“Well, Kuroko, who’s that?”

Mikoto asked as she tilted her head. Kuroko stopped crying and simply answered,

“A suspect of assault and vandalism.”

“HE DOESN’T HAVE ANY RIGHT TO LECTURE ME, THEN!!!”

Hearing Kuroko’s answer, Mikoto shouted as she wanted to shake the hand off,

But in that right hand, the irritating, bone-chilling sensation she had felt a few times just a little while ago was swimming up her body.

“EH?”

The next moment, Nayuta used the “overload” electric shock to shoot a powerful surge at the guy in the white uniform without mercy.

Nayuta commanded Mikoto’s power to overload and attack the guy in the white uniform. However, she realized that there was something complicated about this.

Both of them were Level 5s.

Nayuta had the data of the espers in her brain, so she knew who Sogiita Gunha was.

Impossible to analyze. That was the result of the Kiharas’ research. They couldn’t even tell if there were valuable AIM diffusion fields to be made use of. This was one of the rare few things in Academy City that existed completely as a black box, and this was Gunha’s ability.

The waves that were shrouded in mystery, a punch that was swung at the speed of sound, like an American comic hero, it couldn’t be stopped, and it surpassed all logic—besides, the theory itself was suspect. He was such a strange esper.

In fact, to Nayuta, the AIM diffusion field around this guy was rather unstable. Even when he was not doing anything obvious, she still couldn’t visualize him in this state. Maybe there was some power obstructing the sighting of the AIM diffusion field.

Thus, she thought of a plan.

Against an opponent that her ability couldn’t handle, she would make Mikoto’s ability “overload” at an opportune time and use the Level 5’s electricity to implicate Mikoto.

Nayuta continued to manipulate Mikoto's "power flow" and let Mikoto's electricity "overload".

In the end, by the time Mikoto frantically used her left hand to hold off the overload, three strikes of electricity had been shot at Sogiita's face.

"O-Onee-sama!? Even if you want to be the straight one, isn't this a little too much!?"

Kuroko said that with a surprised voice, not knowing what was going on.

Seeing her like this, Nayuta calmly said the fact she had kept hidden.

"I did that just now."

"Eh?"

Though she could have shifted the blame onto Mikoto, Nayuta definitely said that it was her power.

"If both sides are criminals, then I have to arrest both of you."

"HOLD ON A MINUTE! DID YOU JUST DO THAT!? S-SPEAKING OF WHICH, YOU'RE ALRIGHT!?"

Mikoto glanced at Nayuta, and then walked towards the guy in the white uniform who had been bathed in electricity.

"Wow, that was a really gutsy and intense attack."

If it were an ordinary person, they would have simply fainted. The guy who had been bathed in such an explosive electric attack just looked like nothing happened as he creaked his neck and grabbed his temple, nodding away, and said,

"It's true that I beat hot pot guy and damaged the railings. These are facts, I won't say anything else! I'll beat Judgment's judgment with my guts!!"

"No, that's not something that should be overcome through guts."

The guy who was released from Kuroko's grip seemed to mutter, and Kuroko seemed like she was listening with a delicate expression on her face.

However, Mikoto used her hand to draw at the opponent's face, and frowned as she said,

"How did you defend against that just now?"

“Hm? I didn’t defend against it. Besides, ‘there’s no point to defending if it’s just that level of attack’.”

“!”

On hearing the guy in the white uniform answer, Mikoto’s temples twitched slightly.

“!! Not, not good!”

Kuroko, who had been with her for a long time, had a bad premonition on seeing Mikoto’s expression.

“?”

On this other hand, Nayuta, who only understood Mikoto through data and rumors, couldn’t understand why Kuroko was so panicky. She was wondering if this was a chance to let Mikoto’s power overload even more, but…

“?”

The values of the AIM diffusion fields Mikoto released weren’t showing that it would overload, yet it was expanding rapidly.

On the other hand, Nayuta no longer existed in Mikoto’s eyes, as Mikoto asked Sogiita Gunha,

“You just blew up that ‘cage’ like that. Are you the same as ‘that guy’?”

“? Oi, who’s the ‘guy’ this lady’s talking about? You?”

Sogiita turned to look at the guy who was hiding behind the vending machine and looking at this. The guy just went “DON’T LOOK AT ME, DON’T GET ME INVOLVED! HOW WOULD I KNOW ANYWAY!?”

Basically, he was saying the same thing he had said a few minutes ago.

“Ahh, if you don’t know, never mind. Either way, the attack just now doesn’t seem to be of your liking. Do you want a slightly stronger attack? It’s bad for your body if you try to force it.”

“Oi oi, missy, are you treating me as some spineless guy? What’s with a gal’s attack? It won’t be effective even if I take one hundred of them, right?”

“Then I can launch another attack like that?”

“Oh! Bring it on!”

As for Sogiita, who answered bravely…

The next moment, with the sounds of rumbling thunder, a thunder strike that was many times stronger than before struck down on him.

As the guy was a suspect who had caused serious damage, Mikoto basically used force without mercy like what she would normally do.

However…

“WOOOHHH!!”

This was an electric shock that would render anyone immobile, but Sogiita just moaned a bit, and once the electricity stopped, he continued to talk like nothing happened.

“Wow, that shocked me! I got a bit numb there. Ah, though I’m a bit numb, it’s not like I have any feelings for you or something like that. Don’t be mistaken!”

On seeing that Sogiita was unscratched, Mikoto said calmly,

“What Level are—never mind, that isn’t important anyway.”

Remembering the face of the guy who kept “calling himself” a Level 0, the Level 5 girl’s eyes were glowing sharply.

“Ohh, it’s true that Level isn’t anything. We really agree on it, anyway.”

“Ahaha, it’s a bit weird to say this in front of Judgment officers…”

“What’s wrong?”

“*Can I request a fight with you?*”

“AAAHHHHH, SO IT BECAME LIKE THIS!!!”

Hearing Mikoto’s words, Kuroko placed both hands on her face, swaying about as she collapsed against a tree.

“H-hold on, what’s going on!? What is that onee-san saying all of a sudden?”

Nayuta asked the weakly swaying Kuroko.

"Onee-sama would normally help us in our work, so she may forget about it. But she hates losing and being treated like a kid the most."

The Judgment officer who just got excluded was impacted really badly after seeing the dark side of her beloved "onee-sama". Kuroko was barely able to squeeze out a weak voice.

"It's a bit sudden to taunt an opponent like this."

"Oh, a duel? Missy, what you said is pretty gutsy."

The guy in the white uniform responded to what Mikoto suddenly said with a fearless smile.

"I'm not really interested in battling girls and kids, but I can't refuse such a gutsy challenge. So be it. Missy, you can attack me all you want. If I can take it, I win, and if I can't or if I fight back, I'll admit that I'm not gutsy enough, and it will be my loss."

On hearing the hot-blooded guy who just set the rules on his own, Mikoto frowned and said,

"Ahh… the more I think about it, I'm reminded of this manner of speech. The personality's completely different, so why is that so? Oh, well, let's just treat it as practice before I face that guy. I'll force you to fight back. Get ready."

Flipping the arcade coin she had taken out from who knows where, Mikoto quickly accelerated the electric output in her entire body.

"So since you're using me as a stepping board to challenge on, 'that guy' seems like he's a really gutsy person! Then I won't run, I won't hide! Bring it on!"

Facing the guy in the white uniform who was still rattling on, *BOOM!!* The Railgun was shot out.

"OOOOOOOOOONEEE-SAMA!? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND!? THIS ESPER IS A SUSPECT, BUT YOU ACTUALLY USED SUCH A MOVE ON A HUMAN OF FLESH AND BLOOD SO SUDDENLY!? No, wait, I seem to hear that it's okay if it's against an opponent in a car, but even then, it's a bit delicate for a Judgment officer."

Remembering that she had once used this attack to finish off a criminal, Kuroko hurriedly lectured her, but…

"No worries, Kuroko. This person feels a lot sturdier than a tank."

"Eh?"

Appearing in front of Kuroko's eyes was the white uniform guy standing casually in the midst of the dust that had been blown up due to the impact.

"Nah hah, hissy (Not bad, Missy)…"

She thought that he mumbled because of the high impact,

But Sogiita seemed like he was biting on something as he said that.

Understanding that the object he was biting onto was the arcade game coin that the Electromaster girl shot out with a supersonic speed, Haratani and the Tokiwadai Judgment officer were both dumbstruck. The blond Judgment officer's teeth were letting out a creaking sound.

Sogiita spat the arcade game coin onto his hand, and stared at it unhurriedly.

Then, after tilting his head slightly, he said with a serious expression,

"Missy, I have something to say to you."

"Wh-What? You're fighting back now?"

Seeing the Electromaster girl who was breaking cold sweat and forcing a smile, Sogiita said,

"Arcade game coins are not to be brought out."

"…"

Everyone there was silent. At that moment, Sogiita seemed like he was worried for the girl who was his opponent, and said,

"I feel that it's better that you return this to the arcade before the shopkeeper gets angry. Well, I can go apologize with you if you want."

After a while, Haratani, who was hiding behind the vending machine, shouted at Sogiita,

"I'VE THOUGHT THIS BEFORE, BUT I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! I HAVE TO SAY IT: YOU'RE AN IDIOT!!!"

"WHAT!?"

On hearing the words that were a blow to him, Sogiita widened his eyes, seemingly in shock.

“I see, so I’m an idiot.”

After lowering his head dejectedly a bit, he quickly recovered and said loudly with guts,

“But, well, SUCH TRIVIAL STUFF LIKE WHETHER I’M SMART OR DUMB IS UNNECESSARY! I DON’T HAVE TO MIND!!”

“BE MINDFUL OF THAT A BIT!!!”

Seeing the opponent who was having an exchange with the boy who seemed to be familiar with him, Mikoto frowned and asked,

“You, you don’t seem like you negated all my power without a scratch, right?”

“How is it possible!? It hurts like heck! But I just overcame it with guts!”

“I see, so you’re a little different from that guy.”

Facing Mikoto who was smiling fearlessly, the guy in the white uniform asked back,

“Then, that move of yours was the arcade game coin cannon, right? It feels like you didn’t use your full power.”

“That was just 30%. You, too, it seems like you haven’t used your full power, and I don’t really like that.”

Mikoto used the iron sand she drew from the ground to form two huge black swords, getting ready in a nitoryu pose.

“Though I can shoot something even larger, let’s try something else.”

The souls of the blades were wrapped in electricity and seemingly cut everything they touched. Seeing them, the fighting spirit of the guy in the white uniform exploded.

“I see! This is a great chance for me to try my guts! You have to accompany me until the end!”

Misaka Mikoto and Sogiita Gunha.

Two of the Level 5s, both of them showed a happy smile—and the intense battle began again.

A few minutes later…

Due to the thunder that struck from the thunderclouds that had suddenly appeared, the area around the park lost power,

But in contrast to the power shortage a few days ago in the other districts, the damage control ended at the minimum.

The residents there were already used to the manmade “calamity”.

♦

(So far away…)

Several seconds before the thunder struck,

Kihara Nayuta stared at this calamity (battle) with near despair.

(This is a battle between Level 5s…)

She could feel the atmosphere trembling just by standing nearby. All the hairs on her body seemed to be standing up.

And above them, Nayuta, who could see and feel the AIM diffusion field, thought that this looked like the end of the world. All the forces were fluctuating intensively, and it seemed like she was standing in front of a typhoon.

(The power difference is actually that great…)

And also, this wasn’t really an intense battle between Level 5s.

One side was attacking, and one side was defending. It was just a one-sided battle.

But even so, there was already such a large flow of power. If Sogiita Gunha used his real ability to fight back, no matter who won, maybe there would be a need to be ready in case the entire park disappeared.

“AMAZING PUNCH… GUARD!!”

Facing the electric strike Mikoto released from her hand, he used what looked like a fist that was shrouded in a mirage to knock it to the ground. It was really a ridiculous scene.

In contrast, Mikoto used the iron sand to create several hundred drills and run them through with electricity, readying them to pierce Sogiita from all over the place, and shot them out. Manipulating the iron sand at such a speed that there was no time to breathe, she also let the empty cans ionize into plasma to distract the enemy’s eyes before running into him, displaying all sorts of attacks.

Was that holding back…?

More than humiliation, what appeared first to her was the anger that she was so useless.

If she hadn't been stopped by Sogiita and continued to fight with Mikoto when she was using "slightly more ability", would she really have survived until the end!?

Seeing the damaged prosthetic hands that couldn't take the impact of the electricity, the girl thought,

(I'm not there yet…)

Behind Nayuta, who was gritting her teeth in regret, Kuroko said,

"E-Either way, it would be better to get away from here! If there are any ordinary people nearby, we should tell them to get away!"

While saying this, she grabbed the collar of what seemed to be Sogiita's acquaintance and got ready to teleport.

Nayuta shook her blond hair, lowered her head…

And then jumped into the tornado of AIM diffusion fields.

"What are you doing!? That's too reckless!!"

Kuroko frantically said, but Nayuta had no intention of turning her head back.

Though she wanted to use teleport to bring her back, she was wondering if she should bring the ordinary person who was beside her. At this moment, another person appeared beside her.

"EXCUSE ME! ORDINARY PEOPLE ARE TO EVACUATE!!"

But on seeing this person's face, Kuroko's body froze.

"W-What?"

The boy whose collar got grabbed by Kuroko looked at the Judgment officer whose face was all blue with shock, looked at what appeared to be an ordinary adult, and looked back again.

At that moment, that "ordinary person" casually said to the boy,

"Boy, I want to know a bit about this."

"?"

"I want to know why you're in this situation. As brief as possible, if you can."

♦

In the tornado of "power", Nayuta tried to force her way in.

(I never thought of winning so easily... But...)

(A little more, just a little more... I want to believe that I can get a little 'closer' to their territory!)

The natural and artificial nerves in her heart were running wild in her body. Even though she couldn't match Sogiita and the Level 5, the Judgment girl continued to head into the midst of this calamity, rushing in at a speed that far surpassed what a human could do.

"AMAZING PUNCH GUARD, GUARD, GUARD!!!"

Sogiita continued to use the mysterious waves to knock the continuous strikes of electricity down to the ground. As he had declared, he hadn't fought back against Mikoto. Besides, it was impossible for him to not be hurt, as it looked like burns were developing on his body.

"You actually knocked electricity down? What did you do? You're the same type as 'that guy', right!?"

"Let me explain! I use telekinesis to gather the Earth's magnetic field into my hand, and use this electromagnetic field to divert the electric flow! I call it Aurora Guard!"

The boy, who was being grabbed by Kuroko behind the vending machine and talking to someone, immediately shouted at Sogiita who said such weird things,

"DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!? STOP MAKING UP SOME RANDOM STUFF LIKE AN ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD!!"

"WHAT!? THEN HOW DID I KNOCK THAT ELECTRICITY TO THE GROUND!?"

Sogiita looked rather amazed as he stared at his own fists. Mikoto rubbed her temples and said,

"Am I seeing a Boke and Tsukkomi routine? Anyway, I don't feel satisfied with this one-sided attack. Hurry up and retaliate!"

“I won’t take back what I said!!”

Seeing Sogiita nod his head forcefully, Mikoto frowned.

“Then I’ll forcefully twist that stiff mouth of yours!!”

Saying what sounded like a line from a villain, Mikoto increased the power output from her entire body.

It was unknown how it was powered as the sky was covered with dark clouds. Seemingly in concert with the trails of electricity surrounding Mikoto, the skies were lit with lightning.

“Fufu, I can imagine what you’re going to do now. Either way, it’ll be really painful if I take one of these. Then, I have to bet all my guts and defend with all I got.”

Sogiita let out a fearless smile, and with that momentum, a tornado of mysterious waves was whipped up.

(Now’s the time…!)

(If I ‘overload’ that electric attack some more, maybe I can cause Mikoto onee-san’s power to wither…!)

Nayuta gambled on this instant chance and rushed in so that she could overload the power, but…

(…! This flow of power!)

The AIM diffusion fields covered her eyes, and because of Sogiita’s “guts”, they became rather confusing and almost unpredictable. Thus, she moved in to try to see Mikoto’s power clearly.

But at that moment, her right leg suddenly wobbled.

(—!?)

Due to the damage she had sustained in her fight against Mikoto, Nayuta’s prosthetic leg started to deteriorate. Thus, what happened was…

With Nayuta unable to command an overload, Mikoto and the thunderclouds roared as one as they launched an attack down on the park.

(You got to be kidding me…)

(This power flow itself is already equivalent to an overload…)

As the terrifying values flowed through her body, an even louder shout and undecipherable wave filled the entire park.

“SUPER ULTRA—DEFENSE!!”

Covered in red, blue, and yellow, with such gorgeous explosions, Sogiita faced this attack.

The terrifying impact spread to the surroundings, leveling all the trees in the park, and Nayuta got swallowed in the vortex of power and immediately got blown out.

“KUUAAAHHHHH!!!”

Because of the “power” in her, she understood clearly that the AIM diffusion fields were flowing back into her body.

She was in a state where she felt that she took in too much power, which was completely different from an overload. The girl’s mental condition was wavering intensely.

(Got to move…! How can I stay here!?)

Moving at her,

A bench that had been blown away by the impact was about to strike her mercilessly.

“AH!”

Nayuta, who shouted without thinking, saw the bench that was flying at her, and inconceivably thought of a girl’s face.

(Sorry, Banri onee-san…)

The girl who was older than her and should be a middle schooler already.

(I can’t become a Level 5 “with everyone”…)

What was flickering in her mind were little, little boatlights.

♦

“Nayuta, you really can’t make it. So you actually wanted to make that experiment ‘succeed’?”

Kihara Gensei laughed once as he said this.

“Wouldn’t that be like pulling the brake on this experiment? It seems like you can’t be called a Kihara yet. Breaking the guinea pigs down and pushing the boundaries is the first step to research, Nayuta.”

The man who was her relative continued to pat Nayuta’s head. The other relatives were the same. Everyone was gentle to Nayuta, but they never praised the girl as a researcher.

Kihara Nayuta was often called a failure, a “flawed item”.

Ever since she was young, she was educated specially in the research lab. She was different from the rest; she was a girl who was geared to be an elite. When she was young, she had several successful highly difficult experiments, and these were “perfect experiments that ensured the safety of the test subjects”. However, to the Kiharas, these were a proof of inability.

Though she didn’t feel insecure, she felt angry over being called a flawed item and a sense of deficiency of truth.

There weren’t any kids in the research lab who were the same age as her. She would sometimes talk to a wide-eyed girl, one 4-5 years older than her called Nunotaba, who had a hard-to-approach presence around her. However, she didn’t really have many chances to talk to her anyway.

And just like that, on a certain day in a facility called the Advanced Education Department, Nayuta met those children.

After asking about them, she found out that they were called Child Errors, flawed items who were abandoned by Academy City.

A boy who she had never met before walked towards her, acting all familiar and uncouth. Nayuta felt unhappy about it, and insulted him like how she would insult others.

“Hmph, so you guys are flawed items who got abandoned by your relatives?”

Seeing this snobbish attitude, the boy responded, “WHAT DID YOU SAY!?” and started arguing with her. However…

The one who defended her was a girl who was also a Child Error.

“Really, guys are so crude!”

Why did you defend me? Nayuta asked. She, Edasaki Banri, smiled and answered,

“Well, we already know that we’re called flawed items by the adults. So we’re grateful to her.”

“?”

“Because she taught us a lot of things even though we were abandoned. I like this Academy City and Kiyama-sensei the most!”

Even though she got marked a flawed item, the girl continued to smile. Nayuta felt that she was really incomprehensible.

But after she headed to the facility to investigate this girl, and after many interactions with her, the doubts in her heart started to vanish unknowingly.

Nayuta, who was always educated in the research lab, started making friends for the first time in her life with Edasaki Banri and the other children.

“If we work hard, maybe we can become Level 4s or even Level 5s! Kiyama-sensei said that before!”

One day, Edasaki Banri said this.

Nayuta knew that wasn’t something that could be done with just hard work alone, but she couldn’t say that. That was because she didn’t want to see Banri’s smile disappear.

“If that’s the case, everyone can thank Kiyama-sensei and Academy City!”

“So we first have to become Judgment officers and defeat all the bad guys in Academy City.”

“So, let’s all become Level 5s, become Judgment officers, and protect Academy City!”

“But can we really do this as flawed items?”

“Yes, we can!”

Nayuta frantically responded to one of the girls who asked in an unsure manner.

“Even if we’re flawed, as long as everyone make up for each other’s shortcomings, we can have the strongest power! Nunotaba-nee said this to the clones. It seems that espers can do this!”

“Really!?”

“That’s great!”

The kids started cheering innocently, and Nayuta stared at them in envy. At this moment, Banri smiled at Nayuta in the same manner.

“Nayuta-chan, let’s do our best as well!”

At this moment, all of Nayuta’s logic in her brain got blown away as she nodded with a smile.

“Yes!”

What she lacked… was already patched up by Banri and the rest.

Edasaki Banri went into a coma because of an accident in the experiment. That happened just several months ago.

Nayuta, who didn’t participate in the experiment, couldn’t come to grips with this sudden reality.

“Kiyama Harumi.”

That was the name of the female scientist who Banri called “Kiyama-sensei”, and the name of the one in charge of that experiment.

Having known that her family was involved in the “deliberate overload experiment”, Nayuta requested to be a test subject in order to obtain large power.

In order to get the power to take revenge on Banri’s and the rest’s “Kiyama-sensei”.

And to get the power to protect Academy City “together” with Banri with the rest.

Also, she thought that…

If she became a guinea pig for all sorts of experiments, the number of children who would be sacrificed will be reduced.

Having such a childish mentality, the girl offered her body to Academy City.

“Ya, Yu-chan. I heard that your body got blown up all over the place? Well, it’s really great that you’re still alive, ‘really great’. Well, powered suits, we gave them to Shiokishi-san and Therestina-nee already. The research on prosthetics wasn’t too good anyway. The damage done to the precision machinery and the life maintenance equipment are a problem as well. But if the entire body’s crushed, we don’t even need to talk about exoskeletons and powered suits, right?”

As the result of the experiment, when more than half of her body got blown up, Nayuta’s researcher relative said that while her body was being modified (or messed with). However, Nayuta just treated that as “power” and accepted it.

And then, time passed…

Listening to the explanation of the state of the unconscious kids, she said to the doctor,

“Well, I’ll settle it, so don’t worry, doctor. Child Errors are flawed items; it’s impossible for them to wake up with their own power.”

Saying that, the girl smiled at the doctor at the end. The doctor never intended to lecture her.

Because this doctor knew about it all.

For these kids called “flawed items”, she cried who knew how many times.

“So I’ll make up for what they lack.”

Remembering all her friends who were unconscious, Nayuta said these tragic words to herself.

“I’ll definitely become a Level 5, become that school’s Judgment officer, and protect the peace of Academy City, and I’ll wait for you. So that everyone isn’t some sort of sacrifice, I will keep waiting for you. I want to be with everyone.”

Without saying any more, the girl continued to harbor a strong will and offered her own body.

As for the ridiculously large amount of funds she got as a reward, she donated them all to the Child Error facilities. It may have been pretense, but if there were funds, at least they didn’t have to send the kids in the facility to experiments for the sake of funds.

She hoped to never have kids who got fooled by scientists like Kiyama Harumi.

But on a certain day, she finally knew.

Kiyama Harumi intended to sacrifice 10,000 people in Academy City to save the children in that class. Nayuta knew of the fact that she didn’t betray those kids.

And also knew of that plan being foiled by a Level 5.

What Kiyama Harumi had done wasn’t something worth admiring.

Even if she used that method to wake them up, nobody would be happy.

The Level 5 called the “Railgun” most likely did the correct thing.

But she couldn't get rid of the idea because of her feelings.

Was this Tokiwadai Level 5 really someone worth admiring? If that was not the case, she had to beat this Level 5 on her own, and then create an ending Edasaki and the rest wished for.

With these thoughts, Nayuta started observing Misaka Mikoto on the first day.

She witnessed her kick the vending machine and take the canned juice away.

And back to now.

♦

The bench was closing in on her, and as Nayuta thought of dying,

Someone forcefully grabbed the shoulder strap of her schoolbag and pulled her back.

And then a woman stood in front of her, blocked the bench, and knocked it away to somewhere empty because she couldn't take it.

(...? Who is it? I can't see an AIM diffusion field.)

(...She's not an esper?)

"Rest here for a while."

The woman said that to Nayuta and headed to Mikoto, who was still in the midst of battle, with fast steps.

"Ku, not bad. But you should be at your limit and ready to start fighting back, right?"

"That was a really gutsy attack. But you're still lacking!"

Both of them were panting, and right now, the two Level 5s were still showing fearless smiles.

Mikoto intended to attack again as she raised her right hand,

But before she could use electricity to bind her opponent, a hand grabbed her from behind.

"Eh?"

Facing such a sudden situation, Mikoto turned her blank face around.

“Misaka.”

Standing there was a woman who didn’t mind the creaking of her own hand and was wearing an extremely icy look. Seeing this, Mikoto’s body, sweat, and electricity all shrank back into her body.

“Recently, the vending machine earnings register seems to be weird. It’s become a topic amongst the staff members. On a side note, you do know that you have to follow the dorm rules first and foremost, right?”

“Ah, th-this.”

Crak crak crak. Mikoto’s face got pulled. She wanted to say something to the Tokiwadai dorm supervisor, but…

“You do know what happens next, don’t you?”

Misaka answered the supervisor’s question—and the moment she did, her neck got twisted with a crack. The Level 5 girl silently collapsed there.

(A Level 0 without powers just manhandled a Level 5?)

Seeing this unbelievable scene, Nayuta was unable to comprehend anything and lost consciousness due to confusion and fatigue.

♦

The moment Nayuta woke up, she found herself being carried by someone on their back.

“Hm? Are you awake?”

Carrying her on her back was the bespectacled woman who had suddenly appeared. She still couldn’t sense any AIM diffusion fields. It didn’t seem like she was an esper. Nayuta, still wary of this woman who had knocked out the Electromaster in one hit, asked,

“Onee-san, who are you? Are you a Hound Dog?”

“What’s that? I don’t recognize such a weird name of a squad, Kihara Nayuta.”

“! How do you know my name?”

Though she frantically tried to get off her back, it seemed that the impact from before was still hurting her, as she couldn’t use her strength properly and could only step on her wildly.

“Don’t worry, I’m just sending you to the hospital. Though you did all sorts of crazy things last time, what you did wasn’t admirable. Wouldn’t your friends be sad to see you battered once they wake up?”

“! How did you know about that?”

“The care center I’m working at had a donation from a ‘Kihara’, and I just did some investigation as a precaution. Well, I felt that it was safe after looking into you.”

“But I.”

She was still didn’t know the other person’s identity. Just as Nayuta lowered her head, trying to argue back,

The voice that interrupted her was the stern voice of the bespectacled woman.

“Well, I have only one thing to say about that.”

“Eh?”

“I can only treat you kindly while you still have to carry this kiddy schoolbag along. Once you’re in middle school, if you do something like that again… *I’ll treat you like I would a Tokiwadai student. Remember that.”*

“…! Y-Yes!”

Nayuta could see a Hades-like spirit behind that casual smile. As someone who could see the AIM diffusion fields, she wondered if she had just seen an illusion. As for the answer to this doubt, nobody knew.

Either way, though she would accept whatever kind of experiment, she would never carry out this “experiment” again if she had to make this bespectacled woman her enemy. Nayuta remembered this with quite the deep impression.

“It’s good that you understand. Now rest there like a kid.”

“Yes.”

On the other side of this terror, she could definitely feel her kindness from deep within. Kihara Nayuta slowly fell asleep on the back of this woman. Nayuta felt a new possibility: that a Level 0 could reach the heights of a Level 5.

One day, she would overcome those Level 5 monsters…

And smile with the awakened “senpais”.

The greedy girl in the greedy family dreamed of such a method…

Sleeping silently and sweetly.

♦

Several minutes later, in a certain place in Academy City.

“So Nayuta-chan’s AIM diffusion field-defense prosthetics are 47% damaged?”

“It seems like she took the Third’s electric attacks.”

“Strengthening and adjustments will likely take ten days.”

“Ahh, that’s good.”

“That may be great data.”

“It’s great to see them destroyed.”

“If they weren’t destroyed, we wouldn’t know their limits.”

“Nayuta-chan finally became an outstanding person.”

“And it’s great that she can’t move within these ten days.”

“For some reason, Nayuta got really obsessed with those lab rats in the overload experiment.”

“Therestina-nee will come and interfere if she finds out.”

“Well, this can’t be helped yo. The ones who developed the Ability Body Crystal were Gensei-jii and Therestina-nee.”

“More importantly, how is Amai’s mass-produced Radio Noise plan?”

“Well, Amata’s son is…”

“…”

♦

“That guy with the red and white shirt with the white uniform over it, I don’t even know his name in the end. But he sure is strong.”

Saying this, Mikoto continued to walk back to the dorm.

After that incident, the researchers from Academy City came over. “We’re going to repair the park. Don’t get nosy to this; hurry up and go back”. Though they didn’t understand why, Mikoto and Kuroko ran away from the park in order to not be glared at by the dorm supervisor.

“Onee-sama, do you want to look for this person because the battle didn’t have a decisive outcome?”

“Well, it’s true that it ended because time was up even though we didn’t go all out, and that guy really irritates me. It’s better if I just focus on ‘that guy’.”

“Who’s ‘that guy’? I’m really mindful of that as well.”

Ignoring Kuroko’s question, Mikoto’s heart was raging with even more determination.

“But I can’t remain complacent. If that guy just retaliated normally, I probably would have lost. There’s really a lot of amazing people in the world. I have to train my ability, too!”

“Ahhh, you’re saying things that a shounen manga protagonist would say. Onee-sama, you should focus on more feminine hobbies.”

Sighing deeply, Kuroko looked at Mikoto.

“Speaking of which, Onee-sama, it’s really convenient for you that you can do an electric massage on yourself.”

Inserting electricity into the neck the dorm supervisor had twisted, Misaka Mikoto looked embarrassed and said,

“Well, it’s alright.”

♦

“Well, I don’t think I lost in terms of guts, but I actually got beaten in terms of momentum. Is that bespectacled woman the incarnate of a Hariti?”

“Hard to tell.”

Sogiita Gunha and Haratani Yabumi were leaning on the vending machine and watching the researchers continue with their “recovery work”.

At first, he said that he wanted to help, and after doing hard manual work like lifting a fallen tree, he was told “leave everything else to us”, so he went to the vending machine to rest.

Gunha and Haratani, who were left at this messy place, recalled the previous scene.

The girl who he had been fighting had gotten twisted *CRACK* by the bespectacled woman who had entered. The next moment, that woman seemed to glide on the ground towards him as she said,

“It seems that our students here caused you trouble. I would like to apologize for this. Please forgive her.”

She said all that as she gave off an invisible pressure.

He didn’t even have time to feel angry that the battle had been interfered with. Sogiita felt a chill down his back as he responded, “Oh, okay.”

Since he had nodded his head and accepted the apology, he didn’t have any right to be angry, and the final battle ended without a decisive outcome.

“But that Electromaster missy really has some guts. She didn’t mock me even when I didn’t fight back, and even wished to fight me on equal standing.”

“Ahh, okay.”

“This world is so big! I don’t know who that Electromaster missy is, but if that had kept up, maybe it would have been my loss. It seems that I can’t be complacent. Got to correct my guts!”

(…Before that, please correct some other aspects first.)

Thinking about this, Haratani didn’t say it as he casually responded.

The faulty vending machine that was famous in Tokiwadai.

Not knowing this rumor, Sogiita put 120 yen into the coin slot. He chose a drink and pressed the button.

Clack. Just like that, the vending machine spat out the product.

“It actually can work even after such an electric shock.”

The leveled trees, the volcanic crater-like stone paving that was ripped off… Despite facing such a devastating situation, the vending machine continued to work. Sogiita Gunha smiled and said,

“You’re rather gutsy.”

As if it was a response to him, the vending machine responded with “you won a prize” music…

Singing that it was still standing firm in this park that was filled with killing intent.

EPILOGUE

A certain pirated broadcast.

Do you know about Level 5s? Ah, I seem to have used this intro before. Well, never mind.

Then, though I always described Level 0s as grains of sand, this world isn't just made of sand grains, stones of a pyramid, birds, and stars. There's something even more bone-chilling.

For example, there's sand that can negate all powers like a black hole, or a spellcaster that can turn the laws of the world topsy-turvy, or a 'monstrous, gluttonous devil' that has pins all over its nun's habit, or someone mysterious who can make their ears big and stuff it into a wallet… guys like these with mysterious abilities. If these people all exist in Academy City, what will happen if people continue to move without knowing anything?

Well, even though these rumors exist, they're not bad either. Just today, there was a 'miracle Level 0' who took down two Level 5s. No, actually, as she didn't even develop her powers, she's lower than a Level 0. Why don't we talk about this cool and interesting woman?

There's a rumor that her ability far exceeds a human's, even those of those Skill-Out members, Kurozuma and Komaba!

There's also a rumor that even though she's able to knock down two stars at one dog, she's unexpectedly naive when it comes to love. Today, let's talk about this naive yet cold-blooded killing machine— *BEEP* *Hm? Wh… wron…? The bro… ast… state…*

Suddenly, what sounded like a sandstorm echoed throughout the network. Hamazura Shiage muttered in front of the computer.

"What? What's wrong!? Who is it!? Forget about Kurozuma; there's someone else stronger than Komaba-san!? OII! WHY DID THE PIRATED BROADCAST END AT SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART!? DID THE NAVY ATTACK THEM!? OI OI!!!"

At the same time, Mikoto was listening to the same broadcast in her dormitory, and slowly closed the laptop.

“Ahh, why did it end? But speaking of which, what’s with this fight between Level 5s? Something dangerous actually happened. But who was the one who stopped that?”

Mikoto was unable to realize that she was one of the people involved. Behind her, her roommate added,

“Speaking of fighting, the commotion at the park was amazing! However, I found out something strange during my investigation. That student called Kihara Nayuta is really registered as a Judgment branch officer. However, her personal information was stored in a thick anti-hacking system, so I can’t break through it on my own. As for that school she mentioned, it wasn’t operational in the first place. If that’s the case, I’ll have to ask Uiharu and Konori-senpai tomorrow.”

“Don’t do that. It’s still justified if it’s a common suspect, but I don’t feel too good about this if we just look into others like that. As for this, I was wrong for getting over my head, so don’t mind.”

“Eh? But as a Judgment officer, I feel that someone who just let Onee-sama’s power overload and attack a compliant suspect was a little too much.”

Kuroko tilted her head. Interrupting her, Mikoto snuggled under the blanket.

“Okay. Well, it’s lights-out. Time to sleep.”

Deep in her mind, she remembered the “memory” she saw from Kiyama.

As for that girl Nayuta, in the end, she never had the chance to talk to her properly. However, it felt like she wasn’t a bad person. Wanting to think about the meaning behind all of that…

“Okay, then I’ll come over with my sweet talk!”

Mikoto did a German suplex on Kuroko, who seemed like she was ready to sneak under Mikoto’s blanket. At this point, to Misaka Mikoto, it was now back to normal.

Of course, there was a reason as to why she didn’t hear the pirated broadcast later.

♦

Ahh… hello… can you hear me? Good, the broadcast’s on again. I’m really sorry about that. Today’s broadcast content has to change a bit. One of the ojous of Academy City’s family of researchers stepped in just now. It seems that the topic just now was a taboo. Ohh, this isn’t submitting to authority! How can a guy not listen to an elementary school girl’s earnest request?

Then, let's talk about something else as well! Actually, that was from one of our sponsors. It seems that this was to be aired no matter how flimsy it was. Well, just forget about all of that. Have you snuck into some abandoned building in Academy City?

If it were per normal, one would think that they would be mugged by delinquents for their money. But what if this were the opposite? What if it's a chance to get money?

Actually, this is a rumor that just appeared recently. It's said that under some vending machine on the roadside are unused debit cards in a 'blind corner' that even Academy City's security cameras can't enter, you know? An earthquake? There's been a lot of them, too, recently. Well, actually, let's just continue talking about the cards. It seems like there's already a few hundred of them taken this month. Actually, I've been looking for these cards as well…

As Misaka Mikoto continued to sleep, Academy City continued to buzz.

A huge, rumbling monster that completely ignored her will for good or for evil, swallowing everything up.

After that, Mikoto met all sorts of incidents, and she faced off against this monster before. However…

That was another story altogether.

END

A Certain Friendship with Machinery

OH!
GA-THUNK
Ha Ha Ha
THAT'S SOME GUTS YOU GOT THERE!
YOU GET SO MUCH DAMAGE AND YOU'RE STILL WORKING...
WELL DONE
I KNEW IT...
...IS THAT MAN TALKING WITH A VENDING MACHINE...?
Kanzaki-saaan
REFE-RENCE: TOARU MAJU-TSU NO INDEX SS ※ PUBLI-SHED BY DENGEKI BUNKO
FEELINGS OF FRIENDSHIP TOWARDS A WASHING MACHINE ARE NOT WEIRD, AFTER ALL!
Shiine